

THE JEWISH ADVANCE

Execute the Judgment of Truth and Peace within your Gates. אֵתֶר וּמִשְׁפַּט שְׁלוֹם בְּשַׁעְרֵיכֶם

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THE FALL OF BETHAR.

A HISTORICAL ROMANCE ADAPTED FROM THE HEBREW.

BY REV. DAVID STERN.

Continued.

XVI.

When Shimeon had uttered the last word, a loud and tremendous voice could be heard exclaiming, "Vengeance." That voice proceeded from the foot of the mountain near the fortress, where thousands of Samaritans had encamped at Papus' advice in order to aid the Jews if the enemy should prove too strong for them. But Papus had made a secret treaty with the Roman General Severus, and with Rufus, the representative of Caesar, to the effect that he should help them in this war, and that he would by his cunning and trickery destroy the leading officers of the Jewish army. He had only brought the Samaritan troops in order to delude Bar Cochba, to remove him from the strongly fortified fortress, and to persuade him to rely on this assisting army, and to fight with the Romans in the open field.

"Ah!" exclaimed Papus, then, "Ah! Shimeon has fallen into the net which I prepared for him! I have put the hook in the jaws of this mighty monster, and have brought him upon the dry land; he shall fall here on this field, he shall not be interred, but his corpse shall be food for the beasts of the earth and the fowls of the air. His beloved Keturah died through my cunning devise, and Eliezer, her father, was murdered through my treachery and vengeance. Ah! how sweet and delightful is vengeance! All the Jews will also be utterly destroyed through the labor of my hands, and none will be able to save them. It is my hatred, which is as strong as death, which has done this; and my vengeance, which is as bitter as the grave, that has now come to pass; and my eyes have the pleasure of seeing it. But my intention to become king over this land has not yet come to pass, nor will it ever be realized, because the majority of the people hate me on account of my belief, and will never consent to choose a Samaritan for their king; nor will the Romans bestow a regal crown upon any other man besides their emperor who occupies the throne in Rome. Therefore do I do my utmost to find grace and good-will in the eyes of the Roman rulers, in order that I may increase in power and wealth, in fame and glory; this is the reason why I have saved Rufus from death, and this is the reason why I have betrayed Shimeon and his army into the hands of Severus."

Many of Shimeon's followers had no confidence in Papus, and had advised Shimeon to mistrust that cunning serpent, many of his counsellors had also warned him to guard himself against that Samaritan adventurer, for they believed that he was digging a pit for his downfall; but many of them had confidence and believed in him, for they could not understand the possibility of the Samaritans helping the Romans, as by such treacherous conduct they would but injure themselves and destroy their country.

The spirit of God had departed from Bar Cochba since the day when he had murdered his uncle, and an avenging evil spirit constantly disturbed him. His heart prophesied to him that he would finally be destroyed; the angel of death with a drawn sword, constantly stood before him, and the grave gaped at his every step to devour him.

"My father told me," Shimeon would say to his friends and acquaintances, "My father told me what he saw when Titus destroyed Judah's fortress and burned God's sanctuary. That cruel

soldier polluted the holy-of-holies, abused our faith and religion, blasphemed the God of Israel, and did everything that was abominable in the sight of God. With a bloody sword Titus pierced the curtain that covered the holy ark, and drops of blood issued from the curtain; the tyrant rejoiced, and said that his sword has pierced the heart of Israel's rock,—he did not know that the blood was the blood of the sacrifices which the high-priest had sprinkled upon the curtain on the day of atonement. After he had conquered our holy land, the tyrant went in a ship in order to return to his country with the plunder of Jerusalem and the captives of Judah, when a tremendous storm arose on the sea, a furious and terrible hurricane, which disturbed the sea to its utmost depths; the ship was lifted up and clashed against rocks, until every one believed that she would break and sink into the mighty waters. Titus then lifted his hand against God, and with a haughty tongue he exclaimed:

"The God of the Hebrews is only mighty when fighting in rivers or on seas. He sank Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, he drowned Sisra and his mighty troops in the brook Kishon, but on the dry land he is feeble and powerless; let him come and fight with me on the dry land, and we will see if he can stand before my sword!"

He was still speaking when the tempest abated, the waves desisted, the waters of the sea flowed as smooth as oil, and the ship floated safely and quietly until it reached its destination. No sooner, however, had Titus left the ship and put his foot upon the dry land, when a voice from heaven exclaimed:

"Now, jester! the smallest of my creatures is proceeding to fight with thee on the dry land; prepare thyself like a man and vanquish him if thou canst!"

At the same moment he was surrounded by a swarm of insects, and the youngest and smallest of them entered one of his nostrils, whence it ascended to his brain and pierced him unceasingly. In vain did the doctors labor, in vain did they advise and experiment, no counsel, wisdom or might could prevail against the insect! Once Titus passed by the door of a smith, and from the noise made by the hammer the insect ceased pecking his brains. From that time on Titus ordered that some one should constantly hammer and make a noise in his presence; but the insect soon became accustomed to the noise, it awoke from its temporary lethargy, and began pecking Titus' brains as before. Finally the insect pierced the tyrant's brain, and absorbed his life-blood day and night, until it became as large as a young dove, its peck turned into copper, and its nails became as hard as iron, and it did not take long before Titus died in fearful pain and terrible agony.*

"Behold!" Shimeon would say: "Behold! I understand the interpretation of this parable, and from my own experience I comprehend the moral which this fable is intended to teach us. For alas! that insect is also pecking at my brain, that insect is also sucking my life's blood by day and by night, and that insect is—the remorse which the wicked man endures after he knows and recognizes his sin and wickedness; those pangs are like insects in the transgressor's brain, like worms in the depths of his heart, and like poison in his reins and bones! And though through worldly cares and the rush of affairs the pain may cease, and the pangs diminish, they are only sleeping, and they will awake with renewed strength and increased energy; they will sting like serpents and pierce like scorpions, until they finally consume the sinner's bones, and drag his mournful carcass down to the grave. Alas!

the image of my beloved Keturah is always present before my eyes, and every moment I see her as she was dashed against the rock, and as her bones rolled in all directions; sometimes I see the corpse of her father, Eliezer, covered with her blood, and Keturah's last words, telling me to console her aged father, sound in my ears with the noise of thunder by day and by night. For these reasons will I arise and plunge my soul into the hurricane of war, in order to silence the destructive insect which gnaws at my heart and consumes my brain and power. My heart yearns for the battlefield and for the slaughtering place, my spirit is anxious for the din of war and for stormy confusion, and should I be delayed for a few days, then my reins would be consumed in my head on account of my transgressions which have triumphed over me."

Really, the vision of this doomed heart was by no means false! His heart predicted his end, and his soul knew that days of suffering and darkness was in store for him.

The sun had left the extreme end of the heavens, and shed its golden rays upon its thousands of shields and helmets in the Roman camp, and the standard which was above the soldiers showed that the war had begun. * * *

The Jews fought like lions, one of them pursued ten enemies, and two made a hundred fly; every one of them made many corpses with his javelin, and the Romans received some terrible blows; they were killed again and again, and their glory was lowered to the ground, and still the Jews had not triumphed over their powerful enemies, who were as numerous as the sand of the sea. The sun had already reached the center of the heavens, and it was not yet known whose hand had been triumphant in the war. The sun had set to its utmost limit, and still it was not known with which side lay the victory and glory. One moment the Jews blew their cornets, and the next moment the Romans would be victorious, by the assistance of new soldiers who were fresh and would fight with vigor. But finally Israel triumphed, and the strength of the Romans failed, for a holy and venerable man suddenly appeared in Israel's armies, an aged man, whose white locks descended upon a purple cloak, whose gray beard commanded reverence and obedience, and who carried in his right hand the flag of Judah,—that man was Rabbi Akiba, who had come with twenty-four thousand men to help his brethren. He advanced with the rapidity of lightning to the front of the Jewish army, and wherever his foot trod the Romans fell as straw before the reaper. When the Romans saw that their strength had departed, and that they were losing the battle, they began to retreat; but suddenly and unexpectedly a loud trumpet blast was heard in the Roman camp, all the drums beat simultaneously, the noise of the cornets ascended to heaven, and all the army exclaimed with all their might:

"May Caesar live forever!"

When the Jews heard that exclamation, and were convinced that the emperor Hadrian had come to command the army, they were greatly frightened, and immense confusion prevailed among their different wings, for they were but few and exhausted, whilst their enemies increased every moment in number and power. Then did Shimeon send a messenger to Papus, asking him to tell his men to assist the discouraged Jews. Papus, with his many troops, left their place, went to the tent of Bar Cochba and united themselves with his army. But in the midst of the confusion of this great and desperate battle, there suddenly came flying a poisoned arrow, which settled in the breast of the lion

upon which Bar Cochba was riding; the lion fell under his rider with a fearful roar, but he suddenly arose and ran into the Roman army, where he killed, devoured, and trod down, like a destroying demon from whom none can save, until he was pierced with sharpened arrows, and fell dead on the ground. But he again gathered his remaining strength, and crawled upon his belly until he came to the feet of his master the king, whom he dearly loved, when he lay down before him, looked at him with a gloomy countenance, heaved his last sigh, and was dead. The king bowed his head upon his faithful servant, in order to pat his head for the last time, when a deadly arrow came flying from some unknown part of the army, penetrated his shield, and entered his left side so that he fell backwards with a terrible cry of pain. Immense confusion prevailed in the army, who all surrounded their murdered king, but Papus with his soldiers attacked the Romans in hot anger, and renewed the terrible battle. The heroes of Bethar fell upon their enemies with fearful yells, and showered arrows and missiles, fire and flame, stones and deadly weapons upon their heads. They retained their places like iron pillars, they stood in their positions, nor did they lay aside their swords until they were slaughtered by the Romans, and not one of them remained in life.

Night spread its mournful veil over the battlefield, which was covered with the dead and wounded. The Romans had been exhausted, wounded and diminished, and had retired to their tents. But on the solitary battlefield could be seen an image, moving as silently as a demon; the image was that of Papus, the Samaritan, who had aimed the deadly missile at the lion of Judah's hero, and who in the evil of his heart had murdered Shimeon. The cursed Samaritan made his way among the corpses, looking for the body of Shimeon Bar Cochba. When he had found it, he knelt down and whispered into Shimeon's ear:

"I pray you, O king messiah, to love Papus and to bless him, because he has brought you to your beloved Keturah."

When he had thus spoken, he took his sword and cut off the head of the king, who had fallen in battle like a hero; he brought that head to Rufus and Severus, and they sent it to Hadrian. But from the forest which was near to the battlefield there issued a huge serpent, who entwined the bodies of king Shimeon and of the lion who lay at his feet, as a commemorative sign that the strength of Judah's lion had failed through the cunning of the Samaritan, the serpent which was more deceitful than all the beasts of the field.

(To be concluded.)

THE JEWS IN CHINA.

The following are extracts from an interesting account of the remnants of the Jews of China, appearing in the recently published annual report of the Anglo-Jewish Association. It is made by J. L. Lieberman, a merchant of Vienna, who was the first European Jew to penetrate into the regions of which he speaks:

"Jews immigrated into Cochin from Europe about four hundred years ago, and became possessed of numerous black slaves of both sexes. In the course of time they manumitted their slaves, who became rigorously attached to the Jewish religion. The descendants of those slaves increased very largely and received some instructions in Judaism from European Jews, arriving in Cochin. Many of the Black Jews have joined the British Army, in which they are regarded as valuable and faithful soldiers.

In July, 1867, I came to the city of Kae-fung-foo, in the district of Ho-nan, six hours distant from the river Ho-ang-fu (which means the Golden River).

Here I found Jews who are termed Taou-kin-kedou (which means 'taking out the sinews from the flesh'). This city is very populous, and its inhabitants profess Mahomedanism. Followers of Christianity are also to be found there. All are dressed alike, speak alike, and conform to the habits prevailing in China. On the first day I invited some men of Israelite descent, and who are known as Taou-kin-kedou. I asked them how they and their families were called, and it appeared to me their names were like those of Jews, only that they were pronounced very corruptly. I inquired what religion they followed, and they told me that they professed the religion of Moses. When I asked them the name of the God they worshipped, they told me "Ye-cho-a-cha" (Jehova), a pronunciation which apparently has been adopted to avoid a profane utterance of that ineffable name. I then asked them whether they had a scroll of the law of Moses. They told me: "We used to have several sefarim (scrolls), but foreigners who came here, and of whom we did not know whether they were Israelites or not, took them from us, alleging that they merely wished to inspect them, and that they would return them to us. But when they once had possession of them they kept them." It seemed to me that these scrolls were purchased for a very high price from the poor of that town. If any one of those people should still have a scroll of the law he would not be willing to show it to a stranger. I was informed that two hundred of their families had removed to Pekin, and had taken with them three scrolls. It was mentioned to me by some of my informants that in this town they had formerly a very fine synagogue, which was built on a model of the Temple in Jerusalem, and had existed for several centuries. In a certain part of the synagogue court, they used to burn incense by day and by night. A part of that building was called Bethel (the House of God). Only Cohanim (descendants of Aaron) officiated there on Sabbaths, festivals and new moons. Men, women and children used to assemble in the Synagogue on days of the new moon. Here the Jews made votive offerings, burnt incense, and chanted hymns and religious songs, which were accompanied by the beating of drums, and by other instruments. On such occasions the Jews feasted and made merry, distributed gifts among the poor, and suspended at the doors and windows of their houses, as also at those of the Synagogue, blue and purple streamers of silk. On the nights of new moons and festivals every Israelite's house was illuminated.

Between the years 1840 and 1850, the Synagogue was completely ruined. Since then it had never been repaired, because the majority of those descendants of the Israelites are poor, and also because they do not feel the need of a synagogue, since they have forgotten the Law and its commandments. When the last of their elders died, the knowledge of the scriptures completely ceased among them. By order of the Government, scrolls of the law were exhibited in the open market-place, and an advertisement in Chinese was inscribed by the side, offering a reward and a leading position to any one who would be able to explain the wording of the scroll. Also the Jews made similar offers in other places, but to no avail. This caused them to despair of their synagogue, which was completely abandoned, and of which not one stone was left upon another. They were ordered not to adopt another religion before the arrival of persons who could read the Law, and who might reintroduce amongst them the knowledge now fallen into oblivion.

I visited the site of their ancient synagogue, and found nothing but stones which were traces of the entrance yard. The avenue appeared to have been about 15 ells in length, by 4 ells in width. The foundation was covered with refuse, and evidently consisted of stone. The stone lintel contained a Chinese inscription in large characters. The words were "li-fas-sze Taou-kin-kedou" (which means "the House of God and the religion of those who extract the sinew from the flesh"). The place occupied by the synagogue is a wretched spot, covered with mire and pools of water. Here I saw a stone pillar, 3 ells in length, by 1 ell in width, with a Chinese inscription, stating that persons who are not of the Israelite religion, should not enter this place. I asked my Jewish friends from whence their ancestors had come to settle here. They could not say that their fathers came from the West, and had been exiled from their land 'because